

NESTING HABITS OF THE EVENING GROSBKAK
(*COCCOTHRAUSTES VESPERTINUS*).BY FRANCIS J. BIRTWELL.¹*Plate VII.*

Photographs from nature by the author.

JUNE 5, 1901, Willis, New Mexico. — Bright and pleasant, temperature 70° F. In company with Olivia I took a short stroll on the bench west of the cabin. There the slope showed abundant signs of avian activity. Evening Grosbeaks were abundant and common, their shrill whistles not infrequently preventing the identification of other sounds. Both males and females were present, and I observed several feeding upon the ground, where they hopped very sparrow-like.

June 6. — Evening Grosbeaks were common, apparently doing nothing but shriek.

June 11. — Olivia and I to-day went up, as usual, to the bench. The usual birds were seen and nothing important noted except the two finds of the day. A male and female Black-headed Grosbeak flew to the ground, and, a moment later, came back, the female first, bearing nesting material. Both flew to a large limb of a great pine tree by the trail, where the material was undoubtedly deposited. I was, however, unable to see distinctly.

June 18. — I shot a female *Coccothraustes vespertinus*; bill apple-green, legs light brown. The stomach was filled with hairless caterpillars about half an inch long.

June 20. — Our last finds to-day were the most important I have ever made, ornithologically²; and the secret of the shrieking Evening Grosbeaks about the slopes is explained. The quick flight of a female (closely followed by a male) bearing nesting material

¹ From the Field Notes of Francis J. Birtwell, Pecos River Forest Reserve, Summer of 1901. Copied and completed by his wife, Olivia M. Birtwell.

[This article has a peculiarly sad interest, owing to the fact that the author met with a fatal accident while conducting these investigations. See 'Notes and News' in the present number of 'The Auk.' — *Edd.*]



FIG. 1. NEST AND EGGS OF EVENING GROSBEEK. $\frac{1}{2}$ natural size.



FIG. 2. EVENING GROSBEEK ON NEST. Photographed in Situ.

directed me to a tree growing almost in the yard, — a pine; and, as I watched, the bird descended to her nest, situated on a horizontal limb overhanging the road. We had hardly finished watching the pair, the male of which did absolutely no work whatever but whistled peculiar, sharp notes from a tree near, when we noticed a similar performance which led us to an immense spruce-tree growing near by, where the female settled upon a nest near the end of a swaying limb. She remained there for some minutes, the male whistling meanwhile and flying about from tree to tree. Then she left and both fed about the vicinity. Many times she returned to the nest, apparently unfreighted, and we left them feeding about the trees near by.

June 22. — During the night some mystic power gifted my eyes as well as Olivia's, for every lump on a tree that we looked at today turned into a nest and every bird with any pretensions or right to be breeding offered introduction to its home with implied invitations for future calls. This latter, however, was not necessary.

It began by my supposed Black-headed Grosbeak's nest of the 11th turning into that of the Evening Grosbeak, and throughout the morning the pair of birds entertained us royally. The female sat upon the nest, on and off, and during the former periods, the male howled encouragingly near in tones only the avian ear could deem *dulce*. Then from the nest, with curious, soliciting cries and fluttering wings, like a great overgrown nestling, she followed him about and by the patient bird was regularly fed. He was willing, however, for when I ceased, it was easy to lead her back to the nest, from which he departed to shriek about the neighboring trees when she had settled herself.

All three Evening Grosbeak's nests are within 100 yards of each other, and, since several other pairs are about, we infer that the species breeds gregariously and somewhat uniformly, too.

After supper, just before dusk, we revisited the scene of the morning's operations to observe the evening attitude of the birds. All the Grosbeaks were silent and apparently absent.

June 23. — Olivia and I visited again the Vale of Vespertina, as we have named the place where *Coccothraustes* and so many birds abound, — the slope behind the cabin. I was yet too lamed from